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Century-Old Lion Killer
'Puts Down Stick' For God

By Robert O'Brien

ILMAMEN, Kenya (BP)--Kiriswa Nairrotiai, killer of many lions, lived in Kenya's arid bush for more than a century before the aged Masai "put down the stick" for God.

The honored Mzee (elder) "put down the stick"--the Masai way of saying "made a decision"--after hearing about Jesus Christ from his own son sometime between his 103rd and 110th year.

No one knew his exact age when he walked two miles to the Ilmamen Baptist Church to be baptized by Southern Baptist missionary Harold Cummins in February.

The Masai date their age by events. The old man remembers being a boy when the first British came to Kenya in 1888. He remembers having passed the stringent qualifications to become a Masai Moran (warrior) in his mid 20s about a year before Nairobi, now Kenya's capital city, existed. It was built in 1899 as a site of railway workshops and became a seat of government in 1905.

In a culture in which old men have special status and influence, his baptism represents a turning point in the slow-growing Masai work of Cummins and his wife, Betty.

It's one of two recent "cracks" in the wall between the two missionaries and the fiercely independent Masai. Not long after the old man put down his stick for God, Masai leaders in nearby Osarai, with whom the Cummins have been in contact for four years, put down their sticks in favor of building a church in their area.

The new church will become the fourth the Cummins have started among the nine contact points they have developed with the cowherding Masai since they began working with them in 1975. By contrast, they have launched more than 90 churches among the Kamba people since 1971.

They believe the conversion of the old Masai will greatly influence other Masai men as they sit around the evening fires and palaver (talk) in the Masai way. Sitting proudly erect, the old man shows them scars from combat with lions. He tells them not only of the many lions he killed as a young Moran, but also of his recent life-changing experience with Jesus Christ. He tells them he has led all in his Boma (homestead of several extended families) to Christ.

The young men, who respect the wisdom of his years, hear him say they should stop preventing their wives and children from attending the Baptist church.

"I also tell them that Jesus Christ is not just for women and children but for men, too," said the old man, renamed Paul Kiriswa after his baptism. "I tell them that Jesus can save old men, not just young men."

When a Masai makes a decision for Christ, says Cummins, it's a "multi-individual decision." He explains spiritual rebirth is an individual thing but a group-oriented Masai will keep the decision a secret or not make it at all if the older men say no.

"The Masai do not listen passively and accept individually: they listen, discuss, let each person present his ideas and come to a consensus," Cummins says. "The old man's decision may have great impact as time goes on."

The decision by the Masai leaders to build a church at Osarai seemed to come largely because they had seen the beneficial effects of the church in other Masai communities where lives had changed as people accepted Jesus.

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They also saw something they liked in Cummins. "Bwana Cummins, you bring light to the Masai," a leader commented during the palaver to make the final decision on the church. "We have already seen that you have given your heart to help us. People will know Jesus because of you. A church here will help us and our children."

As the afternoon continued, each man spoke his piece and heard from Cummins and two other visitors. "The church in other areas has brought oneness among the people because one thing-- Jesus--is being preached," one leader observed, as other nodded. "If we all pull together and pray together, God will help us."

A particularly old Mzee spoke up. "We knew about God from the beginning, but we did not know about Jesus Christ."

Speaking in proverbs in the Masai way, he told Cummins: "Your word to us is like two men walking together. One sees a rhino. He warns his friend of danger and says, 'Let us walk another way together.' You have come from God to warn us of danger. We are inviting you to walk with us and warn us which way to walk."

By the time Cummins drove away, after sharing a meal of goat meat and roasted corn, the leaders at Osarai had promised a 60-acre tract on which to build a church and school. They also hoped, they said, something could be done to develop a water supply there to help their families survive.

Cummins left happy over the decision but frustrated at the lack of missionary personnel to follow up on growing opportunities among the Masai and continuing development and community work such as agricultural evangelism.

If they come they will find plenty to do, Cummins said. In his travels through the bush, he has seen no other missionaries but himself and his wife working in a 100-mile area from Kajaido in the south central portion of Kenya to the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro on the Tanzania border.

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(BP) photo to be mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

SBC Returning To Middle
Ground Says McClellan

By Bob Allen

Baptist Press
3/14/83

LOUISVILLE, KY. (BP)--An ultraconservative mood prevailing in the Southern Baptist Convention the last few years may be giving way to a more moderate viewpoint, according to a seminary professor and former SBC executive.

Albert McClellan, visiting professor of church and denominational administration at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., who retired in 1981 after 32 years with the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, said the current extreme right stance of the SBC is not permanent.

"Extremes are never permanent," McClellan explained. "We will resume the middle ground. There was a time when we were more middle road than we are now but I think I see signs that we are coming back from the extremism of the right."

McClellan said there are several signposts pointing to the reform:

-A "definite withdrawal" from a movement to "make the Baptist Faith and Message statement a creed." Ultraconservative leaders are talking less about "change" and more about "understanding," McClellan claimed.

-The way SBC President James T. Draper Jr. made appointments to key committees for the 1983 convention at Pittsburgh, McClellan said, "indicates a desire to come short of the extremism of the last few years." (Draper made a pledge to announce his appointments prior to the 1983 SBC to give Southern Baptists time to study and react to them. He has done so.)

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-A recent public apology by evangelist James Robison of Hurst, Texas, to SBC leaders. "If it were sincere," McClellan said, "it is a sign he is among the others receding." (Robison, who has leveled verbal attacks against "more liberal" Southern Baptists, wrote a letter to SBC leaders and met with Baylor University professors to ask forgiveness for the assaults.)

-McClellan also noted "a disenfranchising of extremists among themselves."

"I don't mean we are off it yet," McClellan said. "I can say more emphatically the pendulum swings. I think we are swinging toward a more middle of the road position. But I don't think we ever will be what you would call 'liberal.'"

McClellan reacted to use of the term 'liberal' by certain groups to identify other factions in the SBC. "The word liberal has no meaning to me. The word has been posted around to mean so many things it means nothing. It's a catch word."

He categorized Southern Baptists into five groups.

"Fundamentalist with a capital 'F' and fundamentalist with a small 'f' form two categories," he said. "The majority of Baptists are conservative, or middle of the road, and so-called liberals also settle into two camps, 'liberal and extreme liberal.'"

The extreme liberals are those who disagree with the extreme right, but other than that have no common base of agreement among themselves, McClellan said. 'Fundamentalists,' on the other hand, embrace five basic tenets--verbal inspiration of the Bible, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection, virgin birth of Christ and dispensational millennialism.

The extreme liberal wants everyone to share his view, McClellan said, while "an extreme 'F' fundamentalist wants to make everyone believe like he believes."

The vast majority of Southern Baptists would accept the tenets of substitutionary atonement, the virgin birth and a bodily resurrection, McClellan predicted, but some depart at the points of dispensationalism and verbal inspiration. He contrasted the concept of verbal inspiration with "a communication of the Holy Spirit."

But he emphasized, "Baptists absolutely believe in the absolute authority of the Bible, whatever they think about the way God gave them the Bible." He went on to say "not a man in this seminary" would reject the Bible as "the final authoritative Word of God."

McClellan scorned attempts to apply the "liberal" label to Southern Seminary. "By any measure Southern Seminary is a conservative seminary. If you don't believe it, go to some of the other denominations' and interdenominational seminaries to compare loyalty to biblical authority. "You cannot live by this seminary's Abstract of Principles and be a liberal."

Last year McClellan surveyed a random sampling of 631 persons, both clergy and laypersons, about their perceptions of Southern Baptists. On a horizontal scale gauging theology from extreme right to extreme left, respondents placed SBC pastors just to the right of the true middle. They placed their state denominational leaders to the left of the pastors but still to the right of the true middle of the road. They placed Southern Seminary just left of center, but with the exception of "extremists," said this is where it belongs. For thought and freedom, McClellan said, those surveyed indicated the seminary should be "on the cutting edge."

Eighty percent of those interviewed said they were either "very happy," "reasonably happy" or "happy" with the seminary.

"I stand on the Bible," McClellan said, "I'm a conservative. What I resent is extremists way over there (to the right) saying 'We are the true conservatives. You are the mod rates.' In doing so they "change the center to crowd many true conservatives out of the middle.

"Too many loyal Baptists are being shoved out of the middle by extremists who are unwilling to accept traditional Baptist norms," McClellan concluded.

Bivocational Pastors Needed
To Reach People For Christ

By Charles Willis

EUREKA, Calif. (BP)--If Southern Baptists are going to be successful in reaching people for Christ, more bivocational pastors will be required to do the job, two long-time, dual-career pastors say.

Gilbert Thornhill and Larry McCain are pastors of churches in California's North Coast Baptist Association which covers an area 50 miles wide and almost 200 miles long. The 19 Southern Baptist churches in the association have a combined membership of fewer than 2,000 persons. Yet in this two-county area, some 90,000 have no church affiliation.

Thornhill, a bivocational pastor by choice since 1955, rises at 2:15 a.m. each day to prepare for a job as distribution clerk at the U.S. Post Office. He is at work by 3:45 and devotes time to community and church work when he leaves the post office just after noon.

Follow pastor McCain has a more traditional schedule since he teaches fifth grade at Eureka's Marshall Elementary School.

Thornhill is pastor of First Baptist Church of Manila, a small community on the edge of Eureka. With a membership of 25 and a Sunday School enrollment of 52, the congregation is struggling against poor economic conditions and low morale. With the closing of area lumber mills, many persons in the community are on welfare, said Thornhill. "There is not a lot of motivation," he observed. "The real weak spot for us is workers. The people aren't real consistent in attendance."

At Trinity Baptist Church, Arcata, where McCain is pastor, resident church membership is 316 and Sunday School enrollment is 343. For 17 of his 25 years as a pastor, McCain has taught school. He attributes much of his church's growth to members who assume responsibilities.

"I see my role as pastor as an equipper of the saints," he said. "I'm not asking my people to do anything I don't do. When we visit, I go visiting."

Despite the differences in the congregations they serve, Thornhill and McCain share similar views of their bivocational status and the need for persons who are trained to serve in such capacities.

McCain said he finds "an advantage in coming in contact with people in the working world. You see how they live and what their workday problems are.

"What I have found in Christ works in my life and my family's lives," he continued. "I see people's lives coming apart all around us. I want for other people what I've found, and I'm committed to that."

Thornhill's burden for the unsaved forbids him to abandon a pastorate that produces such small results for his large investment of effort. "I have tried to go back and serve as a layman on several occasions," he recalled. "I can't be happy that way very long at a time. I feel more in God's will under the handicaps and hardships (of the current pastorate) than I do sitting in a pew somewhere."

The bivocational pastor's finances can have a substantial effect on the church he serves.

"How many pastors do you know who earn a year's salary for 175 days of work?" McCain asked in reference to his teaching job. "I am free to put money back into the church's work because I teach and my wife, Betty, teaches. There is a joy in giving. You can set an example in giving. Bivocational pastors give the churches more financial freedom to grow."

Thornhill, likewise, contributes much more to the church than he receives financially. Last year, he and his wife, Ruby, who works part time for the association office, contributed more than half the church's financial support. He receives no cash salary from the church, but does have modest life insurance premiums and SBC Annuity Board contributions paid by the church.

Having a small church financially dependent on the pastor can also present a big problem. Thornhill, 62, can retire from the post office if he chooses in order to give more time to the church. But he feels reducing his tithe in ratio to his anticipated retirement income will cause the church to "go under."

Time, also an important consideration for the bivocational pastor, must be well-organized when two full-time jobs must be done well.

McCain cites a shortage of "study time and praying time," but he supplements scheduled hours for these activities by listening to sermon and Bible study tapes in his car.

"I work a lot better under pressure," McCain said. "If I were full time I'm not sure I'd be any more effective--perhaps not as effective."

Thornhill is a director of the local community services district which oversees water and sewerage policies. Because this gives him additional community visibility, he feels the investment in time is beginning to pay off for the church. His day off from the post office each week is devoted to visitation and other church business. In order to attend any evening association activities, he must sleep in the afternoon to accommodate his post office schedule.

"I get a fairly liberal vacation from the post office which gives me time to attend conferences," Thornhill said.

Recalling that the bivocational pastor is "very much a part of our American heritage," McCain hopes to see more persons prepare themselves educationally to serve in two jobs.

"You have to be committed," he cautioned those who consider such a lifestyle. "You have to know why you're here in the world. For me, personally, there is no problem being bivocational. Recreation is doing those things you enjoy doing," McCain said.

"Everything in my life centers around Christ, and I would just go batty if I were playing golf. The bivocational pastor who feels comfortable and good about what God has called him to do doesn't feel like a second-class citizen or deprived in any way."

Thornhill agrees that commitment is a basic requirement for a bivocational life. "We all talk about how important bivocational pastors are," he said, "but we don't all want to preach where they do."

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Nashville bureau of Baptist Press

CORRECTION--In (BP) story "Southern Baptist To Aid 4,000 In 11 Thai Villages," mailed 3/9/83 in seventh paragraph please change "609 missionaries" to "60 missionaries."

Thanks,
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